

Managing stakeholder relations in multi-site, multi-layered evaluations

stakeholder relations

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Introduction¹

The successful evaluation of large complex multi-site and multi-layered programs requires more than the development of a robust methodological design. It requires careful consideration of issues including the style of operation of the evaluators as well as beliefs about the roles, rights and responsibilities, and therefore the information needs of the diverse stakeholders in such evaluations.

Patton (1997) observed that the solution to increasing evaluation usefulness lies not in piecemeal wisdom as expressed in evaluation proverbs and provisos, or in lists of tricks of the trade. Conducting successful evaluation studies that influence decision-making, he argues, requires a comprehensive approach—one that is focused from the beginning on adding value to all stakeholders—rather than on meeting statutory requirements to ‘do an evaluation’. To achieve this focus requires understanding that the ultimate acceptance of evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations, is affected by every aspect of the evaluation, from its initial conceptualisation, to strategies adopted for data gathering and analysis, interpretation, and communication of the results.

This thinking underpins a utilisation-focused approach often demanded by government-sponsored evaluations. These concepts must be more than an abstract intellectual activity, the goals and roles of the evaluation must drive its processes.

The key to the success of evaluations, in our view, is not in the methodological sophistication of the study design, or the ‘glitziness’ of the processes and products used to disseminate findings. The key to success resides in the quality of the relationships developed with stakeholders before and during the evaluation. As Patton (1997) concludes:

the potential for enhancing utilisation lies less in its capacity for rationalising decision making, than in its capacity to empower the users of evaluation information.

The paper discusses how this philosophy was implemented in a recent evaluation of the fourth quadrennium of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP IV)². This program, which is described in more detail below, is a comprehensive vehicle for responding to homelessness in Australia. It is a jointly shared initiative of the Australian (national) and state governments, and involves more than 1200 non-government and community organisations in the delivery of services. The program serves nearly 100,000 people annually and has an annual budget of around A\$300 million. The evaluation employed a number of innovative approaches to ensure appropriate engagement of stakeholders at different



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levels. There are several lessons that can be drawn from this experience that are relevant to the wider context, particularly in relation to enhancing social justice in multicultural environments.

Context for the evaluation

For several years, the Australian Government has required programs like SAAP, which provide federal funds to the state and territory governments for a specific period of time (called lapsing programs), to be subject to an evaluation and review process before they can be reauthorised. Sometimes this requirement is specifically provided for in the program's authorising legislation. Usually, this process is conducted by a contracted independent reviewer, external to government, who may be appointed directly or selected through a tendering process. Central government agencies, including the Departments of Treasury and Finance and Administration (DoFA) play a significant role in this reauthorisation process, and usually require compelling evidence of the program's effectiveness before recommending further commitment of resources. Central government agencies are therefore a key audience for the evaluation's findings.

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As the SAAP program has been in place in one form or another for nearly 20 years, the program may be described as having reached a 'mature' status. As such, it was timely to consider not only the effectiveness and efficiency of the program, but also the appropriateness of the program as currently configured within the social, political and economic context for the immediate future.

Background to the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

It is necessary to have some understanding of the scope and structure of SAAP to appreciate the significance of the evaluation which we undertook in 2003. It is difficult to describe the complexity of the program succinctly, and readers are referred to the full evaluation report for further description of the program elements and outcomes (Erebus Consulting Partners 2004).

Concern for the collective wellbeing of all members of the community has long been accepted as a central responsibility of governments at all levels in Australia. There has been a long history of social policy initiatives and programs designed to assist those most in need. However, it was not until the introduction of SAAP in 1985 that there was a single program for addressing the needs of homeless people.

SAAP is a Commonwealth–states/territories program developed to provide a joint agreement to funding and administering service delivery and providing policy responses to homelessness in Australia. SAAP commenced as a national program in 1985, following a review of all Commonwealth and state/territory programs providing support and accommodation for people who were homeless and for women escaping domestic or family violence. That review recommended the various programs be integrated into a single cost-shared initiative administered by the states/territories.

The program has seen steady growth in service provision since its inception. Initially, 500 funded services were in operation, increasing to 1282 funded services in 2002–03. The way in which services are delivered within the program has also changed. In the early years, the response to clients' needs involved providing a bed and safe environment for the night. In recent times, many SAAP service providers have moved towards a case management service delivery that caters for the needs of its clients so that they can achieve a degree of self-reliance and independence.

The client group that receives assistance from SAAP includes young people, women and children escaping domestic violence, older homeless men, single women, and people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. According to the SAAP national data collection, demands on the currently funded service providers are high, with an estimated 97,600 clients supported in 2002–03. The program has continued to evolve through each agreement, with subsequent shifts in emphasis in client groups serviced and models of support provided. The primary aim of SAAP IV is to provide transitional supported accommodation and related support services to help people who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness to achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence, with the goals being to:

- resolve the crisis
- re-establish family links where appropriate
- re-establish a capacity to live independently of SAAP.

In addition to funding for direct service provision, program initiatives have included:

- development and implementation of a national data collection (NDC) through the establishment of a national data collection agency (NDCA)
- development and implementation of a research program and information strategy
- implementation of case management, assessment and referral processes to link clients and services within the housing, education, labour market and community sectors
- development of innovative service provision for children accompanying adults seeking SAAP services
- development of flexible responses to the needs of all target groups, including young people

and families requiring mediation, single adults, people with mental illness, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and those from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

There are various mechanisms in place that provide the framework for the implementation and governance of SAAP. These mechanisms include the SAAP Act, Memorandum of Understanding, and Bilateral Agreements, which set out accountability arrangements, management structures, and funding allocations. The program is managed by the National Coordination and Development Committee (CAD), which is responsible for ensuring a nationally consistent direction for the program. CAD comprises senior officers from the Australian Government and each of the states/territories. There is also an advisory mechanism—the Australian Government Advisory Committee on Homelessness (CACH)—whose role is to advise the Australian Minister on matters relating to homelessness.

The SAAP IV evaluation methodology

The evaluation of SAAP IV took the form of a strategic review rather than an intensive and exhaustive investigation of every issue that might have impacted on the implementation of the program.

The SAAP IV National Evaluation included a systemic whole-of-government approach to reviewing and analysing the program's outcomes. The overall purpose of this evaluation was to assess the extent of success of the assumptions and strategies enshrined in the Memorandum of Understanding between the Australian Government and the states. In other words, the key aims of the evaluation were to determine whether there was:

- setting of clear national strategic priorities and clear accountability processes
- additional flexibility provided by these governing documents that enabled individual jurisdictions to determine local solutions
- the elimination of administrative duplication to enable more effective service delivery to homeless people.

Evaluation framework

The framework for, and design of, the SAAP IV National Evaluation was built on certain premises about the nature of enquiry and how it can be used and synthesised for evaluative purposes. A single, large-scale evaluation was felt to be inappropriate within the timelines available and the complex nature of the policy and program being evaluated.

According to one theorist, effective and successful evaluation practice takes into account several different 'forms' according to the underlying generic purpose of the enquiry (Owen with Rogers 1999). This evaluation project called for the production of knowledge products based on two particular forms of enquiry and data collection.

Type of evaluation undertaken

From an evaluation perspective, the intervention by SAAP in homelessness is complex. SAAP is an intervention delivered in a multi-level and multi-site environment, thus having a complex program logic. The actual logic of the SAAP program (that is, the end-means and cause-effect relationships by which the program's outcomes are delivered), is not easily described and has not been clearly articulated. Thus, the design and implementation of the evaluation of SAAP IV evaluation had limits which needed to be understood, both by those responsible for framing and managing the evaluation and by the evaluators and other contributors to the evaluation in undertaking their tasks.

To tap into a complex intervention such as SAAP and to meet the information needs of the range of the program's stakeholders, to both inform future policy and program developments and options, meant that a tailored and pragmatic evaluation design was needed (Datta 1997).

Governments agreed that the SAAP IV National Evaluation was to be conducted with a key meta-evaluation component, but should have both a proactive component and an impact component (see Figure 1 overleaf).

Understanding the differences between these forms was important to governments involved in planning this evaluation. Clearly identifying the

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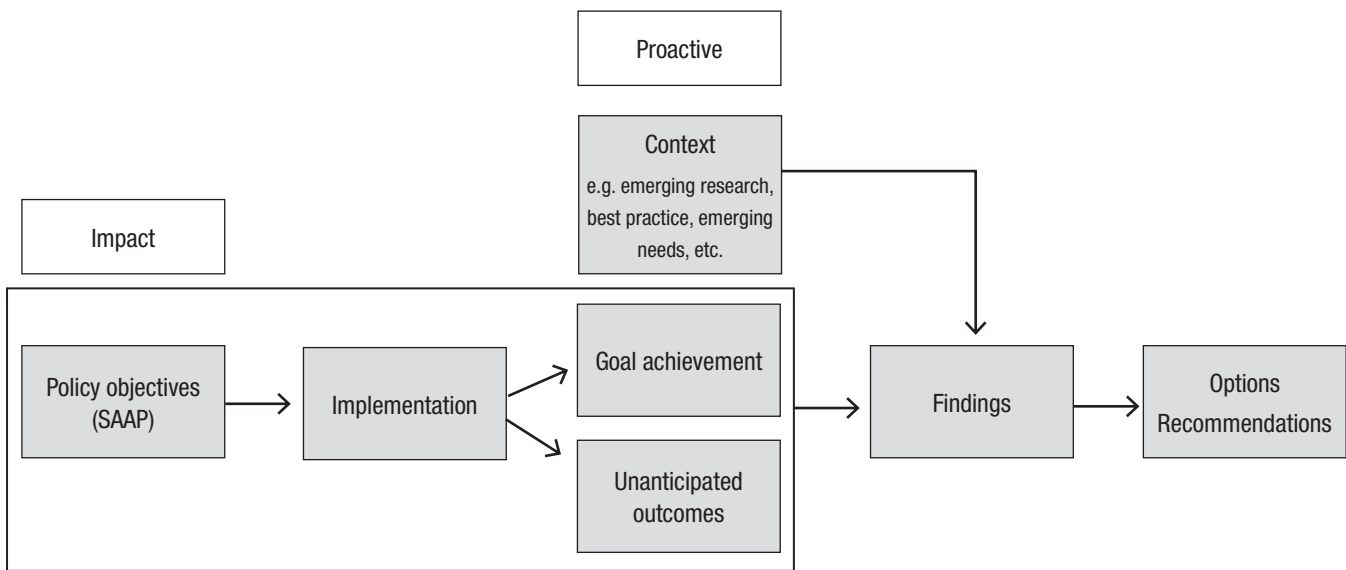
generic purpose of the evaluation up-front has a flow-on effect, which helps to frame the questions (issues) that need to be addressed, and in turn, allow the evaluators to choose methods to use to find answers to these issues.

Owen (1999) has described the two distinct forms of evaluation used in this evaluation. Typically, Owen notes, impact evaluation is used to assess the impact of a 'settled' program. It assumes some logical end-point analysis at which a statement of achievement is needed (and so can be thought of taking place 'after' the program has been delivered).

By their nature, impact evaluations are retrospective, providing a traditional program review or performance audit, concentrating on what has happened. In the case of the SAAP IV National Evaluation, impact was assessed in various ways, including changes in employment status, housing status, and income status before and after periods of support.

However, as all governments had agreed that the results of this evaluation would be used to inform the future policy and program directions to address homelessness in Australia, further work in the form of a proactive evaluation was needed. Typically, a

FIGURE 1: GENERAL MODEL FOR THE DESIGN OF THE NATIONAL EVALUATION



proactive evaluation notionally takes place ‘before’ a program is designed or a program is redesigned. Its aim is to assist program planners to make decisions about the type and shape of program needed. A proactive evaluation, thus, places the evaluator as an adviser and, as was the case with SAAP IV evaluation, is designed to provide policy-makers with findings including advice about future policy development.

To address these requirements, the research questions were developed in relation to the standard conceptual framework for evaluation of program effectiveness, program accountability, program efficiency, and future directions illustrated in the model below. In other words, the evaluation focused on:

- program effectiveness, that is:
 - what outcomes has it generated?
 - how have these been achieved?
 - how has this been measured given the diversity and needs of the clients?
- program accountability, that is:
 - how has compliance worked?
 - how has the program’s management (nationally and at jurisdictional levels) worked?
 - how have the stakeholders seen program accountability?
- program efficiency, that is:
 - how much was spent for what outcomes?
 - what is the cost of homelessness to society generally?
- future directions, that is, there is a need to question the findings of the (above) basic evaluation questions and assumptions:

- are there different ways of doing things to be more effective?
- is there a policy divergence or convergence between stakeholders?
- what is the most appropriate future direction for the program?

Underpinning each of these standard questions was a critical, higher level question of ‘Does this program constitute good policy?’

Why was the evaluation successful?

Much has been written about the general lack of utility of evaluation findings on policy, and about ways in which this situation might be improved, see for example (Weiss, 1999). In our experience, the question of evaluation utility is determined as much by the context within which the evaluation takes place as by the technical quality (including methodological design) of the evaluation. We have found, for example, that evaluation studies are often commissioned because they are required by either legislation or convention, rather than because the program managers have any particular interest in an objective judgement of the program’s operation and success.

This is not an abstract issue, and despite the length of time this topic has been recognised and the number of articles written about it, for those of us who make a living as professional evaluators, it remains extremely relevant. Survival within the profession requires the establishment and maintenance of a level of personal credibility, which is built in part on a reputation for producing evaluation ‘results’ that are useful to the client. By ‘results’, we refer not only to the reports or other tangible ‘products’ of the evaluation, but also to the overall ‘experience’ of the evaluation. A well-written report with sound conclusions and recommendations,

is not in and of itself a positive outcome, if, for example, the data-gathering process was an unsatisfactory experience for the participants.

Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman (2003) propose a framework within which different meanings of evaluation utilisation may be considered. This framework includes:

- 1 Direct or instrumental use—that ‘serves the needs of stakeholders’, and is most often used immediately.
- 2 Conceptual use—where the findings are used by ‘others’, with the use not necessarily being apparent to the evaluator, with use being in the long-term.
- 3 Persuasive use.

This framework can be used to explain the success of the SAAP evaluation.

First and foremost, in terms of its *instrumental* use, the evaluation satisfied the requirements set by the government, and specifically the central government agencies, for credible information upon which a decision about the program could be based. Second, the evaluation was instrumentally useful to the broad range of stakeholders (including the Australian national and state government ministers and their departments responsible for Community Services, and organisations providing services to homeless people) in that it led to a decision to reauthorise the program with funding for a further five-year period. At a managerial level, the evaluation was useful to the program managers in providing strategic direction for the enhancement of the program’s operating policies and procedures. A SAAP redevelopment unit called a ‘Futures Team’ has been established within the federal Department of Family and Community Services to take these strategic directions forward during the next funding period. For the homeless service providers and advocates, the evaluation was successful in that it provided them with a ‘voice’, and real opportunities for input.

At the *conceptual* level we believe that the evaluation will be influential for the ultimate beneficiaries of the program (homeless people and their families), in that the widespread acceptance of the findings and the models and philosophies underpinning the recommended future directions should lead to improved quality of life and sustained independence post-intervention. This recommended future direction includes changing the underlying paradigm of many homeless services that focus on welfare, rather than wellbeing. The former type of service provision often addresses symptoms of homelessness rather than root causes, and often results in simply perpetuating the problem they attempt to address.

The evaluation has also been *persuasive* in assisting the greater uptake of the concept of ‘joined-up’ or whole-of-government responses to social problems such as homelessness. It has also helped to focus greater attention on the outcomes that are desired rather than the busyness of the enterprise. The evaluation did not initiate this thinking, nor has it yet persuaded everybody of the merits of these approaches, but has helped argue the case for the further adoption of these models.

Factors which contributed to the success of the evaluation

The fact that the evaluation was successful in terms of utilisation did not come about by accident or fortunate happenstance. It came about as a result of careful forethought about the overall evaluation design, and the ability of the evaluation team to give substance to the principles that have long been recognised as essential for effective evaluation utilisation. Leviton and Hughes (1981) summarise

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these principles as:

- relevance
- communication between researchers and users
- information processing by users
- plausibility of research results
- user involvement or advocacy.

The evaluation design attempted to address each of these factors specifically. In short, we believe that the successful outcome of this evaluation derived principally from the design or framework of the evaluation, the appointment of a dedicated evaluation manager to coordinate each of the processes in the framework, and the engagement with stakeholders by the evaluator in meeting the various needs of stakeholders in their contribution to the evaluation. Each of these is briefly described below.

Evaluation management structures

The SAAP National Coordination and Development Committee (CAD) was the Steering Group for the National Evaluation. This group was responsible for the following processes:

- Terms of Reference for the National Evaluation
- a Technical Reference Group to advise it on the methodological processes of the evaluation
- the engagement of a National Evaluation Consultant to synthesise, analyse and present all

of the qualitative and quantitative data available in assessing the program's policies, activities and outcomes

- the engagement of other consultants to undertake the linked reviews of aspects of SAAP IV (component modules) to inform the main evaluation
- linking the evaluation processes on CAD's behalf by the creation of a dedicated position of SAAP IV National Evaluation Manager.

Each of the above four processes are now briefly described.

Terms of Reference for the SAAP IV National Evaluation

The Terms of Reference for the evaluation were jointly agreed by the Steering Group for the evaluation. The Terms of Reference were comprehensive and inclusive, and designed to examine critically the policies and strategic directions which were put in place for the program from 2000. They could also be described as courageous in that governments were receptive to an independent critique of the program, how it operated in their individual jurisdictions and what shape it might take in future.

The challenge to all jurisdictions in agreeing to such a broad, but targeted, terms of reference was in overcoming some jurisdictional sensitivities about whether the directions taken were appropriate in meeting the program's strategic directions, and whether the options arising from the evaluation could be accepted by their governments. The Terms of Reference also formed the basis for the separate evaluation components which reviewed the fundamental parts of this meta-analysis.

SAAP IV Technical Reference Group

A Technical Reference Group (TRG) was put in place to provide the evaluation's steering group (CAD) and the Evaluation Manager, with advice on the evaluation's methodological robustness. Members of the TRG were resourced for their input to the process through the sitting fees to members for attendance of meetings and other contributions. The Evaluation Manager also supported the group.

The specific tasks set for the TRG were to:

- advise the National SAAP Coordination and Development Committee (CAD) through the SAAP IV National Evaluation project manager on the evaluation's methodology and other areas of the evaluation to ensure each aspect is dealt with in a way which upholds the key principles
- provide advice to the SAAP IV National Evaluation Consultant, through the National Evaluation Manager, on key or strategic areas of the evaluation.

The TRG was required to take account of the key principles informing the SAAP IV National

Evaluation framework, which were:

- independent review processes applied to all parts of the evaluation—to enable governments to consider the outcomes and outputs of the evaluation objectively
- transparency of processes—to enable all stakeholder perspectives and input
- ethical and credible processes—to address potential stakeholder perceptions of fixed outcomes or 'closed shop' processes
- adequacy of participatory processes—to enable both testing of methodological and other issues, and input from all stakeholders
- robust methodological processes—to ensure that the National Evaluation Consultant and other module consultants address the Terms of Reference of the National Evaluation effectively.

The TRG comprised a Chair and members with expertise in SAAP and homelessness issues and broader social policy and program matters. In addition, the body representing the service delivery agencies also had membership on this group. The steering group was represented on the Reference Group by one Australian Government and one state member and the National Evaluation Manager, who provided administrative and other support for the Reference Group.

The Chair of the Reference Group was appointed specifically for his expertise in evaluation concepts and practice. His role was, initially, to advise on the efficacy of the design of the evaluation framework, and to assist in the appointment of the evaluator. The TRG, which met four times during the evaluation, provided its advice to the evaluator in a peer review relationship.

SAAP IV National Evaluation Consultant

The task of the National Evaluation Consultant was to examine the impact (implementation and outcomes) of SAAP IV and to inform any considerations on the future directions of the program. These tasks included the coordination of the evaluation's data, evidence and the knowledge products (the results, the separate component evaluation modules, and the program's research projects which were commissioned prior to the evaluation taking place), and to synthesise their findings into a final report.

The working relationship established between the Evaluation Manager and the evaluator and evaluation team was integral to the day-to-day and strategic planning, conduct and findings of all parts of the evaluation, as these were to be the key inputs to the final report of the National Evaluation Consultant.

Separate component evaluation modules

To make the most effective use of the limited time available for this evaluation (less than six

months), the evaluation was designed as a strategic review with a meta-analysis focus. In practice, this enabled the evaluation to be made up of a number of smaller evaluations ('component evaluation modules') to be undertaken as linked reviews of the main aspects of SAAP IV. These separate evaluation modules were undertaken by independent consultants with particular expertise in the relevant areas examined. Their 'work in progress' and final results were made available to the principal evaluator as data to inform the evaluation and for synthesis and analysis.

The component parts addressed included:

- SAAP IV Accountability Framework
- SAAP IV Strategic Themes (as described in the SAAP IV Memorandum of Understanding) and the Capacity of the SAAP Service System to undertake its task effectively
- SAAP IV Information Management Planning (which included the SAAP national data collection)
- SAAP IV National Research Program, which was put in place to provide the program with an evidence base and to inform future policy and program developments.

When these component evaluation modules were finished (during December 2003) their findings were then synthesised by the National Evaluation Consultant to form the final report of the SAAP IV National Evaluation.

Futures think tank exercises

In addition, a 'homelessness futures' exercise was designed to explore future social policy responses and approaches to addressing homelessness.

This 'futures exercise', which formed a significant plank of the evaluation's proactive analysis, was undertaken in a number of ways. Each of the component evaluation modules was required to provide advice on future directions relating to their particular focus. However, in addition, the evaluation's steering group considered that it was equally valid to investigate and 'test' other future policy responses with a more independent group of participants. To do this, the steering group put in place a series of three 'think tanks' whose aim was to discuss and provide advice to the evaluator on three key aspects of homelessness—namely, homelessness in urban, rural and regional settings, and for Australia's Indigenous citizens.

These think tanks involved participants with a range of expertise and skills, including academics, homelessness service delivery practitioners, and practitioners from other service delivery/social policy areas and social and economic policy experts. The diverse range of skills and expertise of those who were invited to contribute to the think tanks provided a sound, and more comprehensive base from which the evaluator was able to analyse and present future options for the program.

Research project forum

Also specific research was funded during SAAP IV to provide the evaluation with evidence about homelessness. A number of the research projects, however, were not completed at the time of the commencement of the evaluation. To enable the evaluator to have access to the emerging evidence and issues from the research projects, a forum of researchers was arranged for this purpose. This forum enabled both a presentation by each researcher of the critical issues emerging from their projects, as well as providing a vehicle for discussion and analysis of these issues and their relationship, contribution to and relevance in the evaluation.

The forum also allowed the evaluator and consultant to communicate. This was regarded by both parties as extremely positive, in that it represented a practical, participatory aspect to the evaluation which was vital to its overall success.

Recognition of the contribution of the Community Services sector and other stakeholders

In keeping with the need to consult key stakeholders, the role of the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations (AFHO) was crucial to ensuring that the sector's views and experience were taken into account.³

SAAP is a high-profile program which addresses a visible and highly emotive social problem. The program's stakeholders are interested, articulate, experienced and strongly committed to advocating on behalf of their sector. Their contribution to the program's directions is recognised as an important part of ongoing service delivery and program management arrangements. In addition, all jurisdictions, to a greater or lesser extent, consult with stakeholders, in particular with the homelessness

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sector peak body, about planning and implementing new or revised policy or program initiatives.

In recognition of the importance of the engagement of the community sector in the evaluation, the steering group agreed to provide funding for AFHO to contribute to the SAAP evaluation. This was welcomed and acknowledged publicly by the sector as the Commonwealth Government recognised the contribution which AFHO could make to program outcomes and program review. By providing funding to the sector

peak bodies to become integrally involved with the evaluation process, the steering group clearly recognised the value that the evaluation would gain from the participation, and the value this would provide on both methodological and practical grounds. This participatory and, one could say, democratic approach to the evaluation, involving the key program stakeholder, increased the evaluators' insight and understanding of the program's operations, and provided a greater likelihood of acceptance by the sector of the evaluation's findings, including a set of future options. The approach was democratic, not in the sense that stakeholders decided the outcome of the evaluation, but in the sense that democracy thrives when all voices are heard, and are seen to be heard.

Contribution by other stakeholders

The other significant contribution to this evaluation process was a national call for submissions from stakeholders to address the terms of reference. This call was initially greeted with concern by many due to the limited time frame for response. The evaluator also agreed to extend the time for such submissions, and also agreed that submissions could be provided in written as well as verbal form. This allowed better, as well as timely, information to be provided by stakeholders.

The critical processes in this evaluation of the

Focusing on the big picture rather than minutiae of service delivery, helped make the evaluation possible within the relatively short time frame and budget, and also helped to avoid arguments about matters of fact and causation that are difficult to 'prove' across the complex and diverse spectrum of circumstances encountered under the aegis of this program.

national stakeholder submission and funding to the sector peak were strong demonstrations of the practical and pragmatic methods adopted to promote participation in this evaluation.

These examples of contribution and participation in the evaluation go well beyond the conventional practices of seeking representation and input to the evaluation processes, and allowed the evaluators in this study to delve more deeply and more effectively into the everyday fabric of service delivery in this program to inform both stronger analysis and future directions options. This was a practical demonstration of the democratic and collaborative nature of the evaluation processes, which was greatly increased through the contribution by stakeholders to the evaluation.

Summary and conclusions

This paper is intended primarily to share some of our experiences with colleagues who are responsible for commissioning and managing evaluations on behalf of government, and those who undertake such evaluations.

Many government programs are large-scale, both in terms of their budget, and the scope of the social goals they attempt to achieve and the number of people upon which they impact. They can cut across state and local government boundaries, and always involve a range of stakeholders. We believe that different approaches are needed to evaluate complex, large-scale policies and programs successfully from those which are used for small, well-defined programs. The former must encourage active and informed participation by all stakeholders. Managing this contribution, as well as the expectations generated by this open approach needs to be considered and planned.

Most evaluations are concerned with making judgements about the effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of the program under review. Many lead to some suggestions about the future directions of the program in question or whether to terminate, continue or modify in some way. All evaluations with which we have been involved have required the collection of evidence about the program's inputs, processes, outputs, and (usually) outcomes.

Most evaluations involve the establishment of relationships between the evaluators and stakeholders. These are all well-known aspects of the work of evaluators, and are reflected, with varying degrees of emphasis, among some evaluation theorists.

What made this evaluation different? First, the decision to focus the evaluation as a strategic review, rather than the detail of the day-to-day operation of service providers, helped to address the issue of relevance of the evaluation. Focusing on the big picture rather than minutiae of service delivery, helped make the evaluation possible within the relatively short time frame and budget. It also helped to avoid arguments about matters of fact and causation that are difficult to 'prove' across the complex and diverse spectrum of circumstances encountered under the aegis of this program.

The processes established under the SAAP IV National Evaluation included a systemic whole-of-government approach to reviewing and analysing the program's outcomes. These processes were successful for a number of reasons, including making use of the SAAP IV program's ongoing model of governance of shared responsibility across governments and stakeholder participation and consultation in key program directions.

Through the program's strategic themes, SAAP IV aimed at an espoused (and possibly somewhat ambitious) idealised outcome, consistent with a paradigm of network governance. Network governance is concerned with partnerships, collaboration, and 'joined-up' whole-of-government and stakeholder approaches to policy and program.

While SAAP, itself, like many other programs, operates through, and with, a range of bureaucratic constraints which circumscribe policy and program development opportunities, these constraints arise fundamentally out the demarcation of inter-organisational and cross-sector responsibilities. This evaluation has recognised both through the framing of its terms of reference, the engagement with a set of critical reference groups (TRG and AFHO), the use of pragmatic democratic and participatory processes, and the dedication of funding to facilitate these. It has demonstrated that success is clearly possible in an evaluation of a program and policy of the size, scope and complexity such as SAAP and that success can be manifested by agreement at government level across jurisdiction or portfolio boundaries. It can, at the same time, contribute to enhanced program implementation and provide new directions for the service delivery sector.

Notes

- 1 This is a revised version of a paper presented at the European Evaluation Society Conference, Berlin, October 2004.
- 2 The final report of this evaluation and a summary report is available on the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services website <www.facs.gov.au>.
- 3 AFHO is the national homelessness peak organisation which works to address and prevent homelessness in Australia. It is funded by the Australian Government to develop and analyse policy, consult with and represent homelessness delivery services, and to provide information on homelessness.

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